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Critique of Comparative Effectiveness of Teacher Management Styles in a Fifth Grade Classroom

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In the research paper, “Comparative Effectiveness of Teacher Management Styles in a Fifth Grade Classroom” the authors, Furman and Loos, write about their experimental research to evaluate the effect of loose and tight teacher management styles on academic achievement and student behavior. This essay will discuss strengths and weaknesses of the research paper with regard to the various components usually found in such research papers.

The literature review includes references to define the two types of teacher management styles and studies that establish a knowledge gap. Assuming the research done by Furman and Loos was conducted in the mid to late 1990s, the studies referenced should be recent enough and sufficient to establish that there is a knowledge gap due to shortcomings in previous research. In the previous research referenced, the teaching styles were not clearly defined or the findings were either not clear or not applicable to other situations or environments. There may be, therefore, a need for research that adequately defines the teacher styles being evaluated and research that is conducted in such a way that the results could be generalized to other teaching situations, schools, and environments. One weakness here is that there is no indication of the grade-levels evaluated in the mentioned studies and, therefore, only an assumption that this Furman and Loos study of a fifth grade classroom will be of value in gaining relevant knowledge in this area.

The background of the study, however, is lacking. There is no indication of why the authors are interested in determining a connection between teaching style and academic achievement and student behavior. There is nothing stated that indicates what prompted the authors’ interest in this particular research and why the subject constitutes a problem.

The significance of the research, also, is not substantiated in the paper. There is no statement of why the results will be beneficial and no statement of how the results of the study will or should be used. The authors fail to inform the reader of how this study will further his knowledge on the subject and how it will help to fill the knowledge gap.

The authors clearly, but broadly, state the purpose and objective of the study as “to determine whether these two different styles do, in fact, have an effect on the achievement of educational goals” and to find out “whether one has the advantage over the other in promoting higher academic achievement and in diminishing behavior that interferes with the educational process,” respectively. On the other hand, the authors never specifically state their research question or hypothesis. The reader is left to infer the research question from the purpose and objective. One way Furman and Loos could have stated two relevant research questions is as follows:

(a) Does a tight teacher management style have an advantage over a loose teacher management style in promoting higher academic achievement?

(b) Does a tight teacher management style have an advantage over a loose teacher management style in controlling student behavior?

Although hypotheses are not always stated, they are commonly used in quantitative studies such as this one. Furman and Loos could have used the following as their non-directional hypotheses:

(a) Academic achievement in a classroom with a tight teacher management style differs from that in a classroom with a loose teacher management style.

(b) Student behavior in a classroom with a tight teacher management style differs from that in a classroom with a loose teacher management style.

The terms, or independent variables, of tight and loose teacher management styles were well defined through the use of references to Overmaier (1991) and Nance (1991). A weakness in this area, however, is that although the instrument for measuring academic achievement was stated as the “nationally normed California Achievement Test,” academic achievement, a dependent variable, was never adequately defined. Behavior, another dependent variable, was not well defined either. The “schoolwide policy” on discipline was stated but what is deemed as appropriate behavior versus unacceptable behavior appears to be subjective and left to the discretion of the teacher.

It is possible the population was meant to be all fifth-grade students in Portland, Oregon but the population of the study is not delineated, so the reader does not know to whom the results of the study would be applied; this, of course, negatively impacts the chance of generalizing the results. Another weakness appears to be that although the actual student sample was meticulously chosen, the sample school appears to be one of convenience, which could lead to biased results. The student sample was not randomly chosen, which could have lessened the possibility of bias, but was, instead, chosen purposively by “the principal,” and “a committee of teachers.”

In the matching of students for the sample, categorical variables such as IEP, TAG, and ESL were strictly controlled in the selection process but their proportional relationship to the population is not known by the reader. Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2011) recommend a minimum of 30 individuals per group for experimental studies and since Furman and Loos used only 28 for each group, replication of the study would be recommended for generalizability of the results; this especially holds true in light of the loss of 11 subjects, during the study, which made the groups uneven in number and possibly unbalanced in the extraneous variables. Another weakness in the classroom samples is the author’s failure to mention such extraneous variables as textbooks, learning activities, etc. within the classrooms. The purposive selection of the teachers could also introduce bias and negatively impact generalizability.

In general, the reader cannot discern whether the sample is representative of the population and how much subjectivity entered into the selection of students and teachers. The final sample was smaller than what is generally considered appropriate for an experimental study and the authors did not adequately defend that the groups were tightly controlled. For the results of this study to be generalized to other students, schools, and settings, replication is highly recommended.

# References

# Fraenkel, J. R., Wallen, N. E., & Hyun, H. H. (2011). How to design and evaluate research in

# education (8th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.